

# **The Purpose of the Interagency Committee of State Employed Women (ICSEW)**

**January 21, 2005**

**Vicki M. Rummig, Chair**

## **What**

This paper describes a recent discussion that took place within the ICSEW to understand members' views on our purpose.

## **Why**

Questions from state employees have recently surfaced regarding the need to clearly and articulately state the purpose of the ICSEW. The questions were:

- Since in DSHS the majority of the employees are women, is there a State Employed Men's Committee to bring up issues for men?
- ... I guess I'm just another ignorant male, but what professional issues at work do women face that men don't?? Or is this just a "get together" club in order to feel good about yourself? If so, why is the State pushing it?
- ...With all of the diversity and anti-harassment training that the State forces us to take; Why is there anything labeled Women/Men - \_\_\_\_\_? I thought we were all employees and any issue that affects one member affects all members.

Upon reflection on, we were challenged to ask ourselves:

- Why is the ICSEW in existence?
- What unique purpose do we serve?
- Are the services we provide solely for the benefit of women or do men benefit as well? Should they?

## **Background**

Executive Order 89-09 signed by Governor Booth Gardner created the ICSEW in 1989. Defined within that executive order were duties including:

1. The Committee shall examine and define issues pertaining to the rights and needs of women employed in state government and make recommendations to the Governor and state agencies with respect to desirable changes in program and law especially in the area of education, training, career development, and other conditions of employment.
2. The Committee shall further advise such state government agencies on the development and implementation of comprehensive and coordinated policies, plans, and programs focusing on the special problems and needs of women in state government.

It is our duty to ask hard questions after 16 years on whether the organization is still needed and, if so, is it needed for the same purposes and should it have the same duties?

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## **Process**

It was determined that the best method for articulating our purpose was to ask a controversial question and let the general membership respond. The intent was to allow the responses to help articulate our purpose and need in today's world. These tough questions were:

- Is the ICSEW in a position today to defend our committee?
- Should the committee be expanded to include men?

However, these questions were posed with the caveat that only the Governor can ultimately decide the fate of the ICSEW.

We held a debate to help spur the discussion. Jan Ward Olmstead (Health Care Authority) took the side of keeping the ICSEW as is, while Lori Nesmith (Department of Social and Health Services) took the side of dropping the "W," expanding the organization to include men. Each was given 5 minutes for opening statements and 3 minutes for rebuttal of the other person's statement. We then opened discussion to all committee members, limiting each to 3 minutes speaking time. The entire process took about 1 hour.

The final step of the process was to hold an anonymous survey asking members to respond by choosing between keeping our organization as is or to expand the organization to include men. In addition, we asked members to state which point brought out in the discussion most influenced their vote and to write any additional points that they felt were important to express.

## **Outcome**

- Keep the ICSEW as is: 36.
- Rename the committee the Interagency Committee on State Employed Women's Issues: 1.
- Drop the "W" and change the committee name to the Interagency Committee of State Employees: 2.

Appendix A is a list of comments with the number of responders answering the same.

## **Noteworthy Observations**

- Members feel there are issues unique to women in state employment.
- Members have experienced unfair labor practices based on gender ("good ole' boys club").
- Members acknowledge many issues are not unique and affect men as well.
- Members perceive there is still a "glass-ceiling" in state employment.
- Members need the support of a women's network and the safe place of the ICSEW to express needs and issues.

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- The ICSEW needs more focus on networking, support, encouragement, mentoring, self-development, and self-empowerment.
- Strong women leaders and how to become a leader is a subject of particular interest.
- The ICSEW needs to be more involved in public policy.

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## Appendix 1 – Survey Comments

Comment	Number of responses
Unfair labor still exists (“good ole’ boys club”).	5
Focus more on networking, support, encouragement, mentoring, self-development, and self-empowerment.	5
There really is a “glass ceiling” (alive and well).	3
Men can request a group for men, ICSEW could assist in getting that established.	3
Women’s workforce issues are unique to women.	3
Include men and boys in as we are now, men are welcome to attend ICSEW events and boys to the Take Our Sons & Daughters to Work Day events.	2
Goal of the committee is to focus on women’s issues.	2
Women don’t get many chances to be members of a leadership group and ICSEW is a chance to do this as well as hear other points of view.	2
Gender disparity/inequity still exists.	2
We know how to work with men and get what we want every day. It’s refreshing to not have to do that here.	1
The committee will remain stronger and less vulnerable to criticism.	1
When men are included in an organization, women tend to close and the men tend to take over. Leave the ICSEW status as is.	1
Women need to focus on how we can make positive change.	1
Need to focus on promoting the group so people know why men are not included.	1
As a group, women are not where we should be.	1
Disproportionately low number of women in top-level positions in state government.	1
87 percent of support staff are still women.	1
Things are better and evolving, revisit this topic yearly.	1
Maybe have a session where each member can provide a brief presentation on their agency and what they have to offer. I don’t think everyone knows what is available and offered by each agency.	1
Many aspects of diversity—so a need for many committees with main focus.	1
Keep focus on relevant issues.	1
Women need a group/process for advocacy, support, and education. It already exists for men, the system we work in.	1
Make up of membership, get more managers as members.	1
May need to research career paths from the clerical field to avoid getting	1

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<b>Comment</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>
stuck in this field for those who choose to advance.	
Can we be advocates for women who are treated unfairly?	1
Women need to support each other and work together on committees to strengthen our state government which includes ALL genders.	1
Issues: Work/Family Life.	1
Issues: Working to make the workplace more humane for everyone.	1
Focus on leadership in state government and be more involved in public policy.	1
We as women can teach our sons, brothers, and spouses about women's issues.	1
I changed my agency's opinion of the ICSEW. They now strongly support it. This was from strong education.	1
The issues we handle are important regardless of gender.	1
We need to partner with men.	1
Some of my best mentors were men who were very active in maintaining parity for women.	1
Lumping all men together is as unfair as saying that we us (women) getting less than men.	1